

John Boosey – Bookseller, Publisher and Sandemanian – A Biographical Note

By Rufus Sweetman 2023

Introduction

In the small, medieval planned town of New Buckenham in south Norfolk is a street called Boosey's Walk. In the churchyard of the adjacent large open village of Old Buckenham is the grave of a John Boosey, who died on 18th October 1820. He is buried with his second wife, Mary Chater, who predeceased him in 1806. Is there any connection between Boosey's Walk and John Boosey and why might John Boosey be of interest?

The answer to the first question is almost certainly yes and the answer to the second question will unfold in the following account.



All Saint's Church Old Buckenham



The author in Boosey's Walk

The Boosey Family

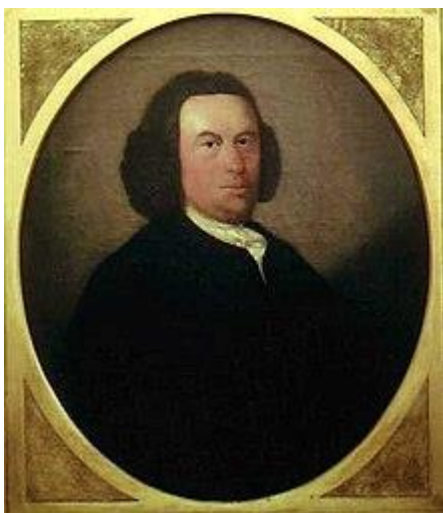
John's headstone tells us he was 84 years old when he died and thus was born in 1735 or 1736. No formal record of his date of birth has yet come to light. However, we know he was the son of Nathaniel Boosey, a malster, and his wife Dorothy, nee Shepherd, and he was born in Bradford House, Bradford Street, Braintree.¹

The Booseys were long established in the Braintree and Bocking area and were prosperous families of woollen merchants, malsters and grocers. They probably originated in the Low Countries and either arrived in the fifteenth century among the cloth merchants, invited to England by the Crown to help revive the ailing English cloth industry, or in the later sixteenth century among the Protestant refugees fleeing persecution on the Continent. These people, although Protestant, when in England tended to be of an Independent or Dissenting persuasion, rather than worshipping in the Church of England, which, even after the Reformation in England, remained too close to the Catholic Church in its theology, organisation and ritual for their liking. This was certainly so for the Booseys who were strongly attached to the Congregational

Church. John's father was probably among the benefactors who established the Bocking End Congregational Chapel in Braintree, and Dorothy Shepherd was the daughter of a Congregational Minister.

The Origins of the Sandemanians

Returning to John Boosey and his connection to the Buckenhams, it is known that he lived in the neighbourhood for a total of over twenty-five years, spread over two periods, and in both cases, it was his faith that was instrumental in his dwelling hereabouts. However, he was not a Congregationalist, but belonged instead to a small little-known sect known as the Sandemanians, though they never used that term themselves, preferring instead to identify themselves as the Church of Christ.



John Glas 1695 - 1773

The sect originated in 1725 far to the north in Scotland where they were always known as Glasites. In 1725 a Presbyterian Minister called John Glas, after much soul searching, decided that there was no Biblical authority for the hierarchical structure, nor some of the practices, of the Established Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Instead, he believed worship should be conducted in small, independent congregations, supported by Elders and Deacons chosen from amongst the fellowship, and, quite unlike the Established Church, these Elders and Deacons need have no formal training or education.²

Glas inevitably found himself at odds with his superiors in the Synods and the General Assembly, eventually, after much internal wrangling over five years, being dispossessed of his living. During this time he continued to gather his congregation for worship in the small village of Tealing north west of Dundee. After being ejected, he moved to Dundee and established another church there. In all, there numbered some fifteen churches in Scotland, though some were short-lived and others very small.



Robert Sandeman 1718 - 1771

This is probably as far as the sect would have reached had it not been for Robert Sandeman, one of John Glas's sons-in-law. The first half of the eighteenth century was a time of great theological ferment, particularly in England, after some of the most repressive legislation aimed at suppressing religious dissent was repealed and many religious tracts and treatises were published. In cities such as London there were literally hundreds of independent chapels, each run by just one preacher jostling for converts alongside the more well-known faiths of the Quakers, Methodists and Congregationalists. Into this fray of discourse and theological argument stepped Robert Sandeman with the publishing of an

obscurely titled treatise, “Letters on Theron and Aspasio” in 1757. This rebutted the work of another preacher and advocated the practices and theology of the Glasites. This proved significantly influential and in 1762 a Glasite church was established in London. Eventually there were about twenty-one Glasite or Sandemanian (this term being used south of the border) churches in England and Robert Sandeman ended his days in New England in 1771 where he had sailed and in which he and his followers established a small number of churches.

John’s training and early Ministry

We know nothing of John Boosey’s early years except that he grew up in a prosperous household with his eight siblings, probably being schooled by the Congregationalist Minister. However, the details of his life begin to emerge from 1754 when he was eighteen or nineteen and he was enrolled at the Plaisterers Hall Dissenting Academy, which became the Mile End Dissenting Academy in 1755.³ The Dissenting Academies were established to train suitable young men for the independent ministry, the more formal academic training of the Universities being denied to them because of their beliefs, though the curriculum was not dissimilar to that of Oxford and Cambridge universities.

John’s training was paid for, at least in part, by the Congregational Board Fund established to support young men such as himself. His training lasted until 1759 when he effectively graduated from the Academy. It will be noted that John was in London just at the time of the theological debates described earlier and the Academies and their students would without doubt have paid close attention to all the discussion. In particular, Robert Sandeman’s influential treatise was published right in the middle of John’s training and the heated debates which followed it would not have escaped his and his fellow students’ attention.

After his training John seemingly did not seek to take up any appointments to ministry and possibly returned to Braintree to his family. An indication of this is that in 1762 he was introduced to one of the Congregational chapels at nearby Wethersfield by Samuel Perry, who, at the time, was Assistant Minister at the Bocking Congregational Church.⁴ (The Wethersfield Congregationalists had divided into two groups some years previously over theological matters and each had their own chapel). It was in this context that we find that the theology of Robert Sandeman had had a profound effect on John, because he openly stated he was following the teachings of John Glas and Robert Sandeman in the practice of his ministry.

The Sandemanian Faith

The Sandemanians’ practice of their faith was in many ways a rather austere matter. They still met on Sundays for Communion but the whole day was taken up with the service. The touchstone of all that they believed and did was the New Testament and in any discussion or disagreement this was what they resorted to for guidance. So the service consisted largely of prayers, Bible readings and exhortations, that is reflections and interpretations of specific Biblical passages. Congregations consisted of hearers, or, as it was termed an auditory, and members. In between the morning and afternoon sessions a communal meal was taken by the members only, served by the Deacons

and this was followed by Communion, again, for the members alone. The midday meal earned the church the nickname of the Kale Kirk in Scotland because of the habit of serving a thick broth which included kale. They also practised washing of the feet, the kiss of charity and the hand of friendship among the members, which they believed had originated in the very early Christian churches scattered around the Mediterranean. To be a member, each individual had to profess their faith to the satisfaction of all the existing members and to be admitted to the church required the universal approval of all present. Every member was encouraged to exhort, no matter what their training or education and there was no sermon as such. Sermons were seen as a path to individuals putting themselves above the Bible and encouraging oratory rather than profound reflection.

This requirement for unanimous agreement extended to every aspect of the organisation and practice of the church. There was no central organisation of the Sandemanian and Glasite churches and each was seen as independent in its own right, so there was no higher authority to which to appeal. Every church was responsible for conducting its own affairs and for appointing its own Elders and Deacons. There had to be at least one Elder and Deacon, which formed what they deemed the Presbytery of the church. They never used the term Minister or Reverend for these offices.

If a disagreement remained unresolved, this would result in the exclusion of the dissenting members and such occasions were not infrequent. Indeed, John himself was excluded in March 1793 and not reinstated until sometime in 1794. This often meant that there was quite a high turnover of members in the churches, though it was possible to be re-admitted just once on the admission of error and repentance.

In many ways it was a very inward-looking faith because it taught that, to be a true Christian, you had to act out your life in accordance with the example of Jesus Christ and through this reach a very personal closeness to God. It did away with the need for the intervention of ritual and an ordained Minister. In this way it appealed to those who had become disillusioned with the more mainstream churches and the many firebrand independent preachers.

All of this, however proved a step too far for the Wethersfield chapel and the last record we have for him at Wethersfield is in 1763 as a subscriber, titled Reverend John Boosey of Wethersfield, to the Society for the Promotion of Religious Knowledge among the Poor, having joined in 1762.⁵ John's teaching had caused deep divisions amongst the congregation and the chapel was shut up for a time. However, John must have left an impression on some of the congregation because there is mention of a small church in Wethersfield in 1768 being supplied with Elders and Deacons by occasional visits from London.

John then took up a vacancy at the Congregational Church in Wymondham⁶ in Norfolk, though exactly how soon after leaving Wethersfield is not known. The previous Minister at Wymondham, a James Davidson or Davison, had left in 1761 and interestingly he had, prior to Wymondham, served at Bocking, so perhaps there is some connection therein. John was never ordained into the Congregational pastorate, and how he organised and ministered to the Wymondham congregation is not known,

but among the extensive extant lists of Sandemanian churches and members there is no record of a Sandemanian church at Wymondham.

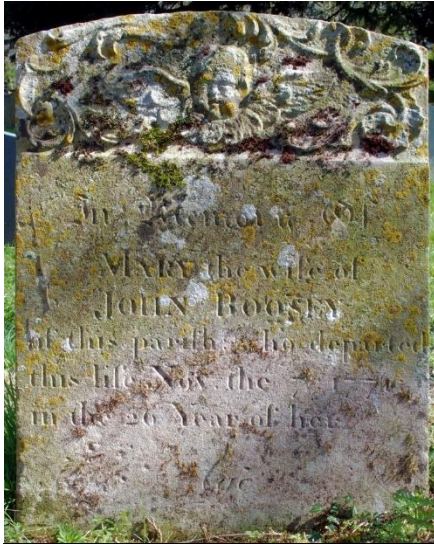
Clearly John was undecided as to the exact trajectory of his faith and the development of his beliefs. It is also possible that there was some pressure from his staunchly Congregationalist parents. After all, his father, Nathaniel, had supported him through his training and additional funding had been granted from the Congregational Board Fund. Indeed, Nathaniel excluded John from his will of 1774, though other members of the family did at later dates leave bequests to him and his children. This does indicate a particular antipathy on the part of his parents to the faith that John ultimately chose to follow.

John's later Ministry

Whatever the case, after just a few years at Wymondham, 1765 proved a turning point in John's life. He resigned the living at Wymondham in June and must have travelled to London because on 28th July he was admitted as a member of the London Sandemanian Church, and not long afterwards, on 22nd October, was elected a Deacon. As well as undertaking this very positive step, he also married on 24th September. His wife was a Mary Livermore and, although the wedding took place at Streatham in South London, where Mary was living with relatives of her mother, she belonged to a family well-established as prosperous merchants in the Braintree and Wethersfield area of Essex and in the earlier eighteenth century an Isaac Livermore had licensed his house as a meeting place for a dissenting congregation. Later that year the couple returned to Norfolk and John was instrumental in establishing a new Sandemanian church in Banham, just south of Old Buckenham. This was described as "settled in order", meaning complete with Elders and Deacons, in 1766, with John now an Elder from 1st January 1766 and a congregation, by June that year, of thirty-seven, having risen from twenty members when starting out in 1765.

There is no record of where the church met and whether a chapel was built is also unknown. In the absence of a chapel, it was not unusual for non-conformist congregations to meet in a member's house or even farm outbuildings or a barn.

During that time, John supported his family by working as a small tenant farmer, as confirmed by a letter from John Barnard, an Elder in the London Church, to Robert Sandeman, dated 14th June 1769.⁷ An extract of this reads, "We have great satisfaction in the Norfolk Church and its presbytery, especially John Boosey, whose labour of love among that afflicted and poor people abounds more and more. To see a man brought up for a gentleman, labouring a very little farm of £17 per annum, for the daily bread of himself and his family, partaking in the wants of the poorest peasant, assisting them in their labour, attending them in their sickness with refreshments, medicines, and all with such an abundant cheerfulness, that I think him the happiest man I know in the world". It is unusual to find a first hand account of any of the Sandemanian Elders at their work and this quote, I think, gives a deep insight into the character of our subject.



John's first wife's headstone

In 1767 a son Thomas was born to John and Mary and then in 1769 a daughter Mary. However on 7th November 1771 tragedy struck and John's wife died, probably in childbirth. Mary is buried in Old Buckenham churchyard just a short distance to the east of where John was buried forty-nine years later. That Mary is buried in Old Buckenham and not Banham churchyard confirms the family must have been living in the parish.

Bookselling, publishing, the Circulating Library and life in London

We know nothing further of John's circumstances until 19th September 1772 when he remarried to a Mary Chater. This marriage took place in London, where Mary lived, although John is recorded as living in Old Buckenham. Mary Chater, nee Hammond and originally from Finchingfield, next door to Wethersfield, was the widow of John Chater, another Elder in the London Sandemanian Church. Her husband having also died in 1771.

John Chater was a bookseller and publisher and also ran one of the many circulating libraries operating in London at the time in partnership with a Thomas Vernor. These were effectively private libraries to which people paid a subscription in order to be able to borrow any of the books for a given period. There were often different rates of subscription which varied the number of books that could be borrowed at any one time or for how long. John Chater's library and bookshop was housed at 39 King Street just off Cheapside in the City of London. The library consisted of some 12,000 volumes at this time.

John Chater's will made provision for his wife to continue the business and expressed his hope that this would happen. Unusually for a woman at this time, this is exactly what Mary did, and she continued the publishing business as well. The British Library Catalogue lists books published by John Chater up to 1771 and then Mary published several books under her own name. Thereafter all publications were under the imprint of John Boosey. Thus, we know that, after marrying Mary, John moved his family to London and took on the business, probably working in conjunction with Mary. However, her name never appears again on the imprint. Nor did it appear in any of the many advertisements that John placed with the newspapers of London and several provincial cities, advertising the library, new books published by himself and books for sale, either new or second-hand published by others.

Although he continued with the publishing side, he appears to have concentrated on the library and bookselling aspects. The library expanded to some 15,000 titles by the time he sold it in 1793. By then it had a reputation as being amongst the best circulating

libraries in London, if not the foremost, with a particular reputation for foreign language titles. It has been said that John travelled quite extensively on the Continent in order to purchase new titles, though I have no evidence of this. However, what is documented is that a schoolboy used it extensively, his family living in King Street. He had been given a ticket, apparently by a stranger, and that schoolboy was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, poet, literary critic, philosopher and theologian, friend of William Wordsworth and one of the founders of the Romantic Movement.⁸

Further evidence of John's integration into the bustling life of London in the later eighteenth century was his admission to the Freedom of the City of London in the Company of Clockmakers by redemption on the payment of forty-six shillings and eightpence.

As time went on, John's son Thomas joined him in the business after apprenticeship to his father in 1785, which ended in 1792, and he took on more of the bookselling and publishing, whilst John concentrated on the library. However, a few titles have been identified with the imprint of both their names. The library remained all the time at 39 King Street, but the bookselling and publishing operated as well from 50 King Street.

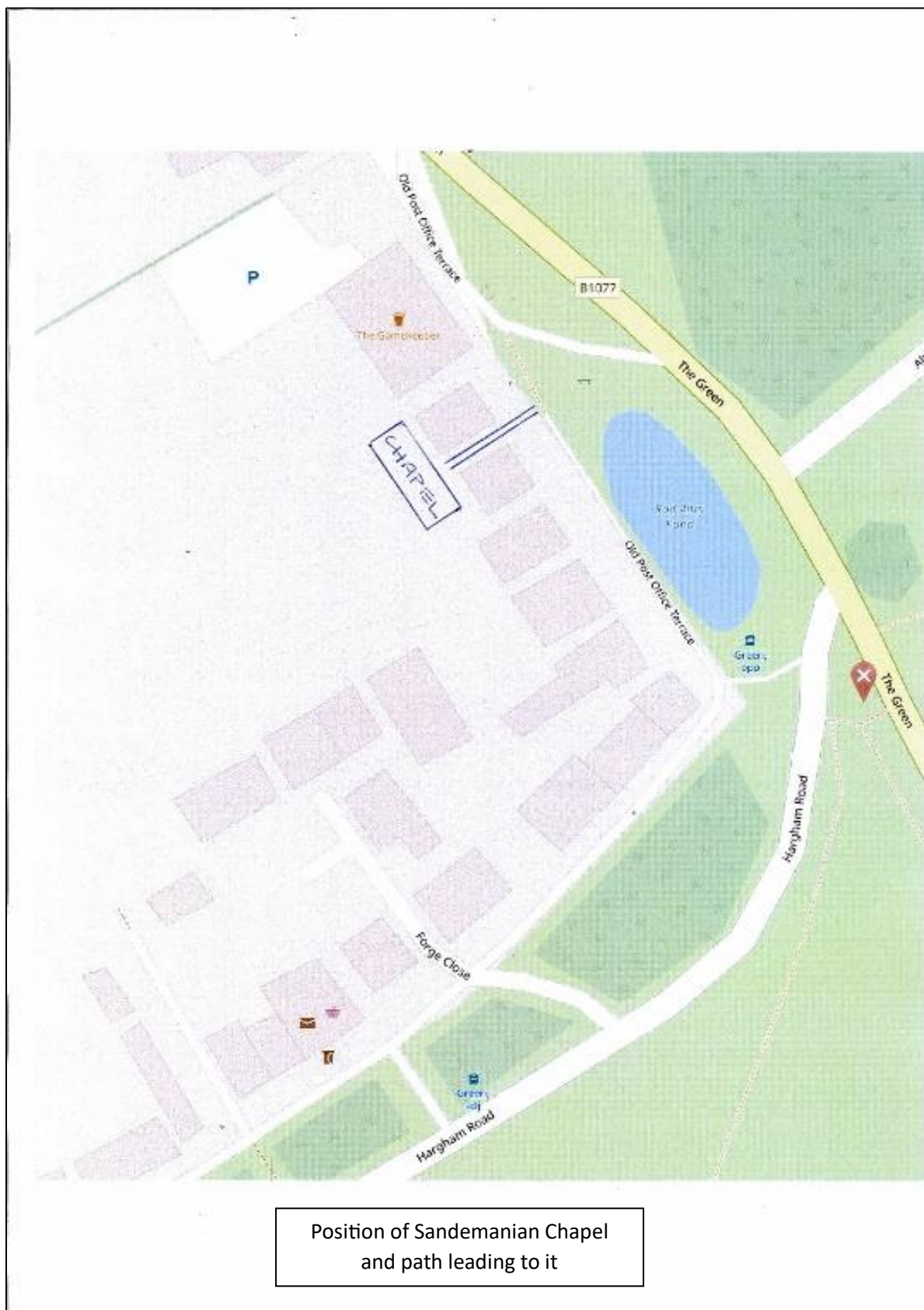
It would appear that, at the time John was in the process of arranging for the sale of the library in 1792, Thomas established his own company under the name of Thomas Boosey, Bookseller and Publisher, with a particular interest in music publishing, and began trading from Old Street, also in the City of London. Perhaps the most interesting fact about these businesses, including the original foundation of the library, booksellers and publishers by John Chater and Thomas Vernor, is that they form the origin of one part of the firm we know today as Boosey and Hawkes, the leading London music publisher. Had John Boosey not married Mary Chater in 1772 and effectively 'inherited' the bookselling and publishing business and circulating library and entered into that trade, there would be no Boosey and Hawkes today, though of course the Hawkes side may well have continued to the present day on its own.

Returning to the Sandemanian churches during John's more than twenty years running the business, he and Mary remained members of the London Church with John in the office of Elder for many years. As for the church in Banham, we know from a letter written by John in 1790⁹ that once he left for London it began to decline. This letter tells us that the London Church continued to provide support and arranged visits of Elders and deacons but despite this it more or less ceased to exist.

This situation lasted until about the time of the letter when the few remaining members of the original church in Banham were re-admitted and several more new members were also brought into the fold. A list tells us that there were just thirteen members in 1790 and they almost certainly were meeting in Stacksford Street (spelt Staxford at the time) in a small building attached to one of the member's tenanted houses, though this has not been specifically identified.

The Old Buckenham Church

A full account of the Old Buckenham church is worthy of another article on its own, but, briefly, the history is as follows. Between 1798 and 1885, the numbers of members varied between thirteen and thirty-one, and in 1853 a new purpose-built chapel was



built at the expense of Thomas Loveday an iron founder and blacksmith with premises facing the Green, occupying what is now Forge Close.

The chapel stood behind the foundry and was reached by a footpath running between two cottages in what is now Old Post Office Terrace, which can still be seen today. It appears for much of its life the Church was unable to find suitable members to hold the offices of Elder and Deacon, so a peculiarly close relationship between Old Buckenham and the London Church developed. Several times every year, right up to 1885, members of the London Church, in particular Deacons and Elders, visited Old Buckenham, often with their families, so that full services including Communion could be held. Altogether, between the years 1802 and 1885, one hundred and forty-seven visits were made by one hundred and thirty-two different people.

Amongst those who visited Old Buckenham was Michael Faraday, the leading experimental scientist of the first half of the nineteenth century, who is credited with, amongst other things, establishing the connection between electricity and magnetism, and developing the concept we know now as Field Theory, upon which is based all of today's electrical engineering from power stations to electric motors and everything in between. Michael made twenty-one visits to Old Buckenham, often accompanied by his wife Sarah Barnard, and on the 31st August 1862 baptised Alice Louisa Loveday, who was the daughter of Elisha Loveday and Sarah Bigsby having been born on the 4th of that month.

John's later life

As we have noted, John sought to sell the library, the sale being completed in 1793, when a syndicate of subscribers purchased it. He seems to have retired completely from all aspects of the trade by 1795, which is the last date that the name of John Boosey, bookseller, appears in any of the London trade directories. In the advertisements seeking to sell the library business, John speaks of wishing to "retire to the country" and this is where we need to take up his story again.

A list of members of the London Church is annotated with the note that he and Mary left for Norfolk in 1799. However the first evidence of his living in Norfolk comes from research carried out by Paul Rutledge on the buildings of New Buckenham.¹⁰ In this, John Boosey is listed as a Tenant of a Nicholas Wanostrocht,¹¹ at the Rookery, in what is now the northern end of Boosey's Walk, for the years 1800 to 1804. The Boosey's presence is confirmed by the Parish Census of 1803 in which John is listed as a farmer and living with two other people, his wife and a servant. So here perhaps at last is the connection between our John Boosey and the street named Boosey's Walk. Quite why the lane running from King Street to the east of the Market Place should have acquired the name of someone who only lived in it for four years is lost to us after two centuries. However it seems too much of a coincidence for it to have been given that name for some reason other than the presence of John Boosey occupying a property located along its length.

It is interesting that John chose to return to Norfolk for his retirement and it was to the Buckenham that he travelled. Clearly, the village of Old Buckenham was important to him, where, by all accounts, he had enjoyed a very happy six years, nearly thirty years

previously. But it must also have been important because it had a Sandemanian Church at which he could worship, amongst whose members were some he knew in the past and to which, as we have seen, many of his former friends and relatives from the London Church travelled several times each year including his son Thomas. It is also worthy of note that he did not retire completely in that he took up his old calling of a farmer, presumably as a tenant. Once again it is his unshakeable faith that drives his progress through life.

For the remaining sixteen years of John's life there are few records, but all that there are show that John and Mary moved to Old Buckenham in 1805 as they are listed as two of the thirty-one members of the Sandemanian Church in that year. Then, their headstone in Old Buckenham churchyard tells us that Mary died on 22nd May 1806 and the burial is recorded in the parish registers on 27th.

Later we have an advertisement in the Norfolk Chronicle for Saturday 28th September 1811, where W.M. Parson will sell by auction "all the household furniture and effects of Mr Boosey". Also in 1811 John is recorded in the Parish Census for Old Buckenham as living in a household of four people, three of them females and that he has no occupation. So it has to be presumed that he most likely lodged with a family which



John and Mary Boosey's headstone

was probably that of another of the members of the Sandemanian Church. Finally, the London Statesman of 20th September 1820 has in it a death notice stating, "On the 18th inst. at Old Buckenham in the County of Norfolk, in the 85th year (this is a misprint, it should be 84th) of his age, Mr John Boosey, formerly of King Street, Cheapside". He was buried three days later.

Resumé

This brings us full circle to the grave of John Boosey in Old Buckenham churchyard, formerly of what is now Boosey's Walk in New Buckenham. I hope it also shows that his life is of interest because it has opened a window into the intriguing story of why there existed a Sandemanian church and its now demolished chapel in Old Buckenham, which in respect of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was a remote small village in south Norfolk. It has also shown us that his former businesses are one of the foundation stones of the present-day company Boosey and Hawkes. In addition, we have learnt that the famous scientist Michael Faraday was a regular visitor to this remote village and he would have passed between the two cottages in Old Post Office Terrace as he walked to the Chapel for worship or walked from his lodgings to the former meeting place in Stacksford Street.

The author is one of John Boosey's many great, great, great, great grandchildren. I have made several visits to Old Buckenham churchyard and cleared around John's first wife's grave and of course around John and Mary's joint grave. I have also found the original footstones of the graves and relocated them behind the headstones. When I was in the churchyard, two people stopped and spoke to me and they knew of the connection between the village and Michael Faraday and the Sandemanians. So it is apparent that there is still local knowledge of the presence of the Sandemanians over 150 years ago.

I would be greatly appreciative of any further knowledge of these lives and events within the communities of Old and New Buckenham and Banham that could be passed on to me and, of course, I would like to hear of any errors in this narrative. I can be contacted by email at sweetman95@btinternet.com.

Rufus Sweetman.

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Notes and references

1 See the excellent work on the history of the buildings in Bradford Street by the Friends of Bradford Street at <https://www.bradfordstreet.co.uk/the-friends-of-bradford-street-1>

2 The Dundee University Archive holds the main collection of Glasite and Sandemanian documents which is where all the references to the lists of members and churches mentioned in the text may be found.

3 See <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/sed/religionandliterature/dissenting-academies/> particularly <https://surman.english.qmul.ac.uk/>

4 I am indebted to the Wethersfield Local History Group for this information.

5 See Report of the Society dated 1763 on Google Books. I am indebted to the genealogist Trevor Pickup for this information.

6 "History of Congregationalism and the Numerous Monuments of the Churches in Norfolk and Suffolk, John Brown, 1877, page 293

7 "Supplementary Volume of Letters and Other Documents by John Glas, Robert Sandeman and their Contemporaries chiefly written between 1740 and 1780", James Morrison, 1865, page 69

8 Notes and Queries, Oxford University Press, June, 1956 J.B. Beer, page 264 and 57.2, 2010, Marianne Van Remoortel, pages 210-211.

9 See Dundee University Glasite Archive

10 I am indebted to Charles Oxley of the New Buckenham Archive for directing me to Paul Rutledge's extensive work on New Buckenham.

11 Nicholas Wanostrocht was a naturalised French émigré and master of a school in Camberwell Surrey. He married a member of the London Sandemanian church, Sarah

Wilson, and one of his brother's children also married a Sandemanian. His name appears as a witness or executor in several wills of the London Sandemanians. Just why he should own an extensive property in New Buckenham is not understood but he was established enough in the town to be a trustee of the William Juby charity. Perhaps he had in mind opening a school in the Rookery but it never came to fruition. His descendants owned parts of the property until about 1832.

With acknowledgements to the opensource OpenStreetMap for the map base.